

According to our Assistant Fire Marshal, James C. Robertson, in the first year of his new responsibility, the fire losses in Maryland were less in 1963 than in 1962. In 1962 there were 168 lives lost in fires. In 1963, other than the aircraft tragedy at Elkton that was an accident of geography, the life loss was reduced to 130. In 1962, there were nine large fires with losses over \$250,000. In 1963 this was reduced to seven. In the six years of my Administration, the basic rate for fire insurance has been reduced by 13 per cent, and the homeowners rate by 20 per cent. This brings to mind an old maxim to the effect that when one catches an unusual string of fish, he does not slink home down the back alley with his catch. Instead he holds them up high as he goes down the middle of Main Street.

In Maryland, the fire departments aggressively take part in the annual fire prevention program sponsored by the National Fire Protection Association. In order that those who catch the big fish can get proper recognition, the NFPA awards for participation in this important activity are made in my office. It was my distinct pleasure to recognize publicly our superior Maryland fire departments and fire marshal's offices on the tenth of this month. Baltimore City did a particularly splendid job by placing fourth in the nation, second in their population category and first in Maryland. The significant thing is that we in Maryland want to recognize those who merit the spotlight of publicity because of their efforts in fire prevention, as well as for fire suppression.

One item that has proven to be of more than anticipated success in focusing attention on the fire problem is an annual two-day meeting of all individuals and organizations throughout our State that have an interest in reducing fire losses. This is known as the Governor's Fire Prevention Conference and is held in the State House in Annapolis. It is chaired by Chief David B. Gratz with help from James C. Robertson and Floyd B. Heimer. The objective of the Conference is to bring together all our people and give them the chance to present their ideas on how Maryland can be made more fire-free. Needless to say, the results have been more than worthwhile and have focused attention on many potential weaknesses in our State's fire defenses.

Were I to make just one suggestion to you, it would probably be to assemble a representative influential fire group from your State to go to your chief executive and sell him on the idea of lending the prestige of his office to a state-wide fire prevention conference. After all, who has a greater interest in the safety and well being of the citizens of a state than the chief executive? Certainly working for fire